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AUTHOR Wesley, Dan
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ABSTRACT

The activities undertaken by the advising system at Oklahoma State University's College of Arts and Sciences are described. In addition, characteristics of colleges that value the academic advising function and the importance of meeting student needs are sketched. One component of Oklahoma State University's advising system has involved institutional research on topics such as: types of changes made in majors, dropping out, freshman persistence, characteristics of graduating classes, and student evaluation of advisors. A job description for an undergraduate academic advisor was also prepared and adopted as part of the policies and procedures manual. The dean is involved in the selection of advisors; and advisor training is accomplished through workshops, training meetings for special purposes during the year, and a continuously updated advisors' manual. In addition, a monthly newsletter for advisors is issued. Rewards for advisors include promotions, released time, and recognition awards. Other aspects of the college's academic advising system pertain to authority given to the advisor, consultation with the dean for special cases, and the offering of a graduate seminar on academic advising in higher education. (SW)

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CHALLENGING OUR ADMINISTRATION

Dan Wesley

Oklahoma State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Oklahoma State Univ.

The perceived mission of an institution would be expected to impact heavily on the kind of academic advising that will be available to students. Considering the goals which institutions generally hold for individual students as indicated by Howard R. Bowen in Investment in Learning, one would expect the primary responsibility of an institution to be that of meeting student needs for cognitive learning, emotional and moral development, practical competence, direct satisfaction and enjoyment from college education and the avoidance of negative outcomes for individual students. All institutions, however, may not be committed to all of these goals. Institutions may be placed on a continuum. At one extreme, an institution may seek to perpetuate itself by professing to serve students while in reality it is concerned only with enrollment. In so doing, it may prepare adequate guides for students to pursue an academic major and have knowledgeable people available to answer questions, be they faculty, clerks, or peers. It would regard it as the student's responsibility to see that graduation requirements are met. It would not recognize that the student may be in a wrong program or that a student may leave an institution for the wrong reason. Many students will change programs, many will graduate, and some of them will, upon graduation, wonder why they got here and where they are going.

At the other end of the continuum one might find an institution which is very much committed to helping students realize the goals set forth by Bowen. In so doing, the institution places the student at the center of its reason for being. The institution chooses a competent instructional staff, a wealth of resource materials and an available library. To help students clarify life plans and to develop life goals, it selects appropriate individuals to be facilitators. It sees that academic advisers are trained.

The advisers will help students become self-directing through a process of teaching decision making. They can in a very deep sense provide an individualized educational experience for students. A student who has had the opportunity for this relationship will also graduate, hopefully with a greater sense of satisfaction in life, knowing why he has arrived at this point and where he is going. At this end of the continuum, the emphasis of the institution is placed on academic advising, whereas at the other end of the continuum, we find emphasis being placed on enrolling students. Most institutions will fall somewhere between these extremes.

Those of us in academic advising who have a real commitment to serving students need to help our institutions see the difference in what we can do. We need to be ready to help those in administrative positions to better understand the needs of students, the importance of selecting the right people for advising and training, and the necessity for providing rewards in salary, release time, and promotion. We have too often assumed that our chief administrators should know the value of the function we can perform. We have the responsibility to help our institutions become committed to recognize the challenge if the institution perceives its mission as serving students for themselves and for society.

The things that we have been able to do in the College of Arts and Sciences at Oklahoma State University are not a model for any other institution. We still have a long way to go before we have the ideal advising system, but we are headed in the right direction. We have been fortunate in having an academic dean who values academic advising. We present here a listing of some of the innovations of the past 10 or 12 years just to let you know what we do. I would like to know what you are doing which could help us make our advising program more effective.

1. We have made studies of our students

a. Types of changes made in majors

b. Drop-out and withdrawals

c. Persistence of freshmen

d. Transfer students' persistence

e. Graduating classes -- where they come from, how long it took, major changes, etc.

f. Student evaluation of advisors on alternate years

g. Success and failure of academically suspended students who had been reinstated

The results of these studies were shared with advisors, department chairmen, and/or our academic dean. There are implications for advisors in most of these studies and we see the role of a caring advisor as being more important to the department chairmen. Our dean is kept informed of all our policies, procedures, and programs; we spare him of having to be involved in day to day operations.

2. Clarifying the advisor's roles and functions

a. A job description for an undergraduate academic advisor was prepared. This was adopted by the college and became our official statement in our Policies and Procedures manual.

3. Selecting advisors

a. The department chairman nominates the advisor(s) for the department on a form prepared for this purpose.

b. I consider the nominations

1.) If questioned due to student evaluations, I call the chairman and discuss the nomination. We work together on this and are most likely to consider changing a year later.

2.) I recommend to the dean for appointment

c. The Dean appoints the advisor for a year term with authorization for the department chairman to allow release time in accordance with the job description policy.

d. This procedure has sensitized department chairmen to the important role of advisors with student evaluations and our dean's involvement in the process.

4. Training of advisors

a. This is the third year we will have a workshop for advisors. The first one was concerned with the use of the ACT profile with David Crockett as our facilitator and a distribution of data on our support services. Last year we concentrated on self-understanding and our philosophy of advising. This year we are concerned with career exploration and job placement as a result of our student evaluation.

b. Advising help sessions are held during the year to deal with such things as preparation of graduation check sheets, procedures to follow during freshmen enrollment, changes in curricular offerings, etc.

c. Our advisor's manual is revised on alternate years, with updates of changes as necessary.

5. Keeping advisors informed

a. We are in our second year with a monthly newsletter for advisors. It informs advisors of upcoming events of common interest, notice of changes in college or university policies and procedures, briefs from some of our studies may be reported, announcement of special graduate scholarships, etc.

6. Giving advisors more authority

a. We will not consider a suspended student for reinstatement before one year except upon the recommendation of the advisor.

b. We will not consider a deviation of college or university policies and procedures except upon the advisor's recommendation.

7. Rewarding advisors.

a. Effectiveness of advising influences promotion, tenure and salary

b. Release time

c. This will be our third year to recognize advisors by providing lunch at the workshop. This year a faculty advisor will be recognized with a plaque for meritorious service. The criteria for selection was: student evaluation, adequacy of graduation sheets submitted for his/her serniors, attendance at meetings for advisors and department chairman's letter appraising the value of feedback obtained from the advisors.

8. Discussing with our dean unique situations which might have implications for deviating from established policies or procedures. Thus, he is kept informed in case someone might wish to appeal my decision to him.

9. A new booklet of requirement sheets for each undergraduate major in the University assembled by the registrar is provided annually to each advisor. This can be a trap if not used properly.

10. We may have gained alittle more creditability a couple of years ago by being allowed to offer a graduate seminar on "academic advising in higher education" — a seminar planned for those who might become 1. administrators, 2. graduate students who might become advisors when they enter the job market, 3. staff who are actually doing advising, and 4. support staff who might interface with academic advisors. This seminar will be offered again next semester in the department of Educational Administration and Higher Education in the College of Education where we have adjunct appointments.